

The Do's and Don'ts of Protecting Yourself from Colds and Flu

Ah-Choo! You know what comes next – a runny nose, a stuffy head, or fever. You want relief, and you want it now. But think twice before asking your doctor for an antibiotic.

Antibiotics don't ever cure colds or the flu. Colds and the flu are both caused by viruses, and antibiotics only fight illnesses caused by bacteria. Actually, using an antibiotic unnecessarily can harm you by contributing to a growing health threat called antibiotic resistance. This means some bacteria become resistant to antibiotics. Ultimately, antibiotics may not work for an infection caused by these resistant bacteria.

If you're sick, you should check with your doctor to determine if you need an antibiotic, but here are some basic guidelines:

Do You Need an Antibiotic?

- Colds and flu – No. Viruses cause colds and flu and can't be cured with antibiotics.
- Sore throats – No, unless you have strep throat, which can be determined by a lab test.
- Cough or bronchitis – Maybe. Most coughs and bronchitis are caused by viruses. However, if the cough lasts a long time, you may have a bacterial infection.
- Ear infections – Maybe. Most ear infections need antibiotics, but some do not.
- Sinus infections – Maybe. Antibiotics can be used for lengthy, severe infections.

Taking Good Care of Yourself

Here are some things you can do to feel better if you catch a cold or the flu:

- Get lots of rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Take over-the-counter medications to treat cold or flu symptoms.
- If you're stuffy or congested, try using a cool mist vaporizer while you sleep.

To help protect you and your family from getting sick, you should:

- Check with your pediatrician to confirm that your children are up to date on their immunizations.
- Get a flu shot.
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly (for at least 10 to 15 seconds) to help prevent spreading the illness to others.
- Maintain a balanced diet.

For more information about the proper use of antibiotics, visit www.caqh.org/antibioticsinfo or www.cdc.gov/getsmart.

Using Antibiotics Wisely

A Prescription for Good Health

Understanding Antibiotics

- Antibiotics do not kill viruses. Many common illnesses like colds and the flu, as well as most coughs, sore throats and cases of bronchitis, are caused by viruses.
- Antibiotics are powerful medications that have one purpose: to kill bacteria.
- Antibiotics should not be used to treat viruses. They will not:
 - Cure the illness
 - Make you feel better faster
 - Stop the illness from spreading to others
- Taking antibiotics when you don't need them can cause antibiotics not to work when you do need them. This is called antibiotic resistance, a growing problem that threatens individuals, families and communities with the risk of infectious diseases that are difficult – or even impossible – to treat.

Using Antibiotics Appropriately

- Knowing how to use antibiotics is as important as knowing when to use them.
- If your doctor gives you a prescription for an antibiotic:
 - Take the medication exactly as prescribed
 - Always take the full dose
 - Never share antibiotics with others
- Don't stop taking the antibiotic once you start feeling better. You may still have bacteria in your body that could make you sick again or cause resistant bacteria to develop.
- Using antibiotics wisely will help ensure that these life-saving drugs work for many years to come.

Fighting Disease

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly to help prevent illness and the spread of germs.
 - Experts recommend that healthy individuals not use antibacterial soaps, as they may contribute to the development of germs that are resistant to antibiotics
- Make sure that you and your children are up to date on immunizations.
- Maintain a balanced diet.
- Get a flu shot.

Antibiotic Resistance

A Growing Health Threat We Can't Afford to Ignore

Can you imagine a time when antibiotics used today are no longer effective? Actually, experts believe that today's antibiotics might not work 10 to 20 years from now because of a growing health problem, antibiotic resistance.

What is Antibiotic Resistance?

Antibiotic resistance occurs when antibiotics are used unnecessarily or incorrectly, causing some bacteria to become resistant to them. This happens because each time we take antibiotics, sensitive bacteria are killed, but resistant ones may be left to grow and multiply.

Why Should I Be Concerned?

Antibiotic resistance is a problem that affects us all. Infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria are difficult to treat and can quickly spread to family members, coworkers and entire communities. If you become infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria, it could result in a longer lasting illness, more doctor visits and the need for stronger antibiotics that may have more side effects. Severe cases could result in hospitalization and even death. In fact, nearly 50 Americans die every day from infections that can no longer be cured by antibiotics.

What Can I Do About It?

The single-most important thing you can do to protect yourself and your family from antibiotic resistance is to use antibiotics properly. You should know that antibiotics kill bacteria, not viruses. Illnesses such as colds and the flu are caused by viruses, so antibiotics will never cure them.

To help combat antibiotic resistance, organizations like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Council for Affordable Quality Healthcare (CAQH) and local health plans are urging consumers to talk to their doctors about proper antibiotic use. Together, they have launched a nationwide educational campaign called Save Antibiotic StrengthSM (SAS).

Tips for Using Antibiotics Wisely

The SAS campaign offers simple, but important, steps that you can take to protect yourself and your family from antibiotic-resistant infections including:

- Use antibiotics only when your healthcare provider prescribes them.
- Don't ask your doctor to prescribe antibiotics to treat a cold, flu or other viral illnesses.
- When you do need an antibiotic, take ALL of the medication prescribed. Even if you feel better, you may still have infectious bacteria in your body that could make you sick again. Never save leftovers for future use.
- Never take or give antibiotics prescribed for someone else.

If you're sick, you should always check with your doctor or other healthcare provider to determine if you need an antibiotic.

For more information about the proper use of antibiotics, visit www.caqh.org/antibioticsinfo or www.cdc.gov/getsmart.